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President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 46

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(a) Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Draft resolution A/53/L.67

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is the intention of the presidency to have a decision taken on the draft resolution once the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the President himself have made their statements.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as President of the General Assembly.

On 10 December 1948, this very body, the General Assembly of the United Nations, over which it is my honour to preside today, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose fiftieth anniversary we are commemorating today.

In these 50 years, humanity has made more progress down the path of freedom than it had in the preceding 200 years. That extraordinary progress was possible thanks to the creative force generated by the Universal Declaration, undoubtedly one of the most noteworthy events of our century and one of the most influential in the political and legal spheres.

The Declaration changed the world's conception of the nature of human rights, which ceased to be a matter of exclusive concern to the individual who possessed those rights or to the society or State to which the individual belonged, and became a value that transcended borders, cultures, societies and ideologies. Human rights of every individual are now also a matter of concern to all humanity.

The old problem of a foundation for human rights and the diligent search for a basis on which to define them — a problem which so occupied and worried philosophers, jurists and politicians in the past — has in a sense lost significance. Above and beyond the theories that justify the sacred and inviolable nature of human rights, we can today affirm that human rights should be recognized and protected simply because that is what all humankind feels and wants and because that has been the expressed will of the entire international community, as reflected in the Universal Declaration.

It is precisely the universal support undergirding the Declaration that makes it unique and gives it its enormous political and moral weight. It is truly the first instrument in the history of civilization that, in containing principles regulating human conduct, succeeded in its mission of truly establishing universal norms. That universality has remained intact despite the growing diversity and profound changes that have occurred in the world since 1948.

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Ensuring the effective enjoyment of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration is undoubtedly one of the priority tasks that the international community and of each its members are obligated to fulfil. Part of that task has been accomplished during the past 50 years. More than any other instrument of modern times, the Declaration generated a powerful and irreversible movement that transformed its noble ideals into positive law and a moral mandate.

Human rights are in fact not merely abstract formulations or ideological flags or, as the Declaration itself states in its preamble, "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" to strive towards. That common standard has been the subject of a process in which the Declaration's general and abstract formulations have been complemented with legal texts that defined, specified and amplified the rights it proclaimed, thereby transforming them into just that, namely, rights, pure and simple rights that are true and positive and can be enforced. This was possible thanks to the intensive legislative activity unleashed by the Universal Declaration at both the national and international levels.

The result of that activity is a complex legal and institutional system comprised of a great variety of bodies, conventions and international instruments of diverse legal values that has been extended and diversified, thereby giving substance and effectiveness to the rights enshrined in the Declaration. In this connection, I would like to recall the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the various human rights conventions, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as being among the most important milestones of this process.

Fortunately, this process has not lost its dynamism, and Governments and international institutions continue and will have to continue to work on new rights. Eloquent proof of this dynamism is the endorsement of the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights and the adoption of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the latter being adopted recently during this very session of the General Assembly.

In addition, numerous new procedural and institutional mechanisms have been created, including international tribunals and courts. The system has thus entered a new stage of development through the establishment of international criminal jurisdictions. In this respect, the International Criminal Court, whose Statute was adopted in Rome just a few months ago, deserves special mention.

Of course, the task has not come to an end; it has not yet been fully completed. As in almost all areas of social life and the law itself, the protection of human rights is something that by its very nature must be ongoing, not only because it is necessary to develop and refine legal instruments that ensure the observance of rights already enshrined, recognized and accepted, but also because it is necessary to update them by incorporating those new rights that become clear to the conscience of modern society as values that deserve international protection. In recent years the international community has witnessed the birth of a second and then a third generation of human rights — not only individual rights but also those of communities and groups, such as the right to development and the right to a healthy environment.

The Universal Declaration and complementary conventions and treaties have in a way created a new international social order in which the relationship between the individual and the State has changed radically. In this new order — in which the rights of individuals and groups supersede those of institutions — the State, as an expression of political society, must play a fundamental role in safeguarding and guaranteeing the enjoyment of those rights.

Paradoxically, while the State has on the one hand been responsible, generally speaking, for the gravest human rights violations, on the other it remains most appropriate institution — and sometimes the only available one — for ensuring respect of human rights in accordance with legal norms, working jointly with international institutions and, of course, non-governmental organizations, each acting in their own respective areas.

Striking a balance between individual freedoms and the field of action of the State, which is responsible for protecting those freedoms, is perhaps the most delicate task of all. For that reason it is vital to harmonize, under the rule of law, the observance and respect of human rights with the principles underlying social peace and concord, without which human rights cannot be duly safeguarded and given institutional protection. This endeavour can put the State in a delicate situation, as has

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happened on occasion, where it must safeguard a fundamental human right that temporarily is competing with another fundamental human right, and where the full realization of one may mean disregard of another for a given period.

Thus we must not lose sight of the fact that the effective realization of human rights takes place not in the abstract but rather within a historical, political, social and cultural context from which it cannot be isolated.

Human rights, justice and peace are the three values that must guide the evolution of international society as we enter the twenty-first century, and the realization of each of these values is a precondition for the realization of the others. Let me recall that the concepts of peace and human rights are invoked in the first two preambular paragraphs of the Charter of the United Nations and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms that link.

I believe that in the quest to ensure the fullest observance of human rights, one aspect is of fundamental importance: the question of the prevention of violations. Genuine and broad respect for human rights can be achieved only if we address the root causes of violations, which, as we are reminded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, originate in the hearts and minds of human beings. This is a fact that we all acknowledge. Those who disregard and violate the rights of others do so because of hatred, selfishness, intolerance or prejudice. All human beings must be prepared, from the earliest stages of their development — when the values and ideals that will guide them for the rest of their life are taking shape — to embrace tolerance, solidarity and respect for others.

The subject of human rights should therefore be taught by educational institutions everywhere, as it is in certain places, beginning in elementary school. That was what the authors of the Universal Declaration meant when they said that teaching and education were instruments for the strengthening of respect for rights and freedoms.

The Universal Declaration, together with the international instruments that complement and enrich it, is a clear indication of humankind's progress towards coexistence at a higher level. This is cause for rejoicing — not only because of what that progress means for the well-being and happiness of thousands, if not millions, of people — but also because it shows, more than in any other area of international cooperation, that the human instinct of solidarity must transcend the materialism and selfishness that often characterize modern society.

At this commemorative meeting, however, we must recall that while a great deal has been done in the past 50 years towards building the political and legal foundations of the system of human rights protection, a great deal still remains to be done in the area of the effective observance of human rights. We must bear in mind that at this very moment, in many parts of the world, there are people who have been unjustly deprived of their freedom; people who have been tortured; abused women; children who have been exploited, victimized by those who traffic in children, or sent to war; elderly people who have been abandoned; and minorities who have been excluded. As long as these affronts to humankind persist, we cannot be fully satisfied at the progress achieved.

The States of the world are gathered here today to commemorate the generosity and inspiration of the Governments and of the men and women who, 50 years ago in Paris, made possible the adoption of the Universal Declaration. Let us then direct our thoughts for a moment to all those who are awaiting our help to recover the freedoms and rights that they have lost and to regain their dignity. We must protect them; we must not forget them, and we must renew our commitment to continue to fight until the day human rights become the common heritage of each and every inhabitant of our world.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I invite the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, to address the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General: We meet to commemorate the half-century of a testament to human hope at the end of a century of human loss. We meet to pay tribute to the spirit of idealism and the faith in humanity that made our forebears believe in the best in man when all around was evidence of the worst in man. We meet to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, we honour the highest of human aspirations and renew our promise to conquer the worst of human cruelty. We pay tribute to the minds of those who conceived of these human rights and to the memory of those who died for them. And knowing the power of human wrong, we reaffirm our faith in human right —

that faith that ultimately will sustain humanity through its darkest hours and help us defend our human rights where they are most imperiled. Human Rights Day 1998 is a day for all of us who enjoy human rights to imagine life without them, and to think how hard we would fight to retain them. It is a day for those who are still denied their human rights to dream again of asserting them, and to know that their dream is our dream — the dream of all human rights for all.

It is a day for us to recall not only the rights attained over 50 years, but also the rights denied; to pursue the achievement of justice by all and for all; to defend against the abuse of human rights with greater vigilance than ever; and to pursue the violators of human rights with greater persistence than ever. It is the day to renew our commitment to globalizing justice in the age of globalization.

I began this anniversary year by reaffirming the universality of human rights and by arguing that human rights are foreign to no culture and native to all nations. Throughout this year, from the streets of Asia to the towns of Africa to the courts of Europe, justice has been done and freedom has been won. Human rights have been proven — beyond any doubt — to be truly universal.

Rights have been asserted where regimes once ruled; justice has been delivered where impunity once reigned; memory has been honoured where crimes had gone unpunished; and, yesterday, this Assembly reaffirmed that all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, must be defeated in the struggle for human rights. Truly, this year has been worthy of the anniversary we mark today and has proven to all that human rights cannot be denied where human beings live and breathe.

To the United Nations, this anniversary is more than a milestone. It is a mirror that reflects how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. It is a mirror that at once flatters us and shames us, that bears witness to a record of progress for parts of humanity while revealing a history and a reality of horrors for others. Above all, it teaches the United Nations that without human rights, no peace and no prosperity will last forever. Our mission is simple: to make every day matter in the fight to broaden the horizons of human rights until that day when no man is tortured, no woman is abused and no child is denied his dignity — when all human beings enjoy their human rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson.

Mrs. Robinson (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): Tribute is being paid today to the vision of those who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was the fruit of much thought about the rights to which everyone on the planet is entitled, simply by virtue of being human, and about our duties towards each other. It is a remarkable document, full of idealism, imbued with a sense of hope and a determination to learn lessons from and not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

The framers of the Declaration would not want us to spend too much time dwelling on the past or commending them for what they achieved. They saw the Declaration as a basis for the long struggle to embed a human rights culture in society. They knew it was only a start, an important first step in seeking a better and fairer world for all, irrespective of class, gender, creed or wealth. They would expect nothing less from us than that we rigorously examine our performance since the General Assembly adopted the Declaration in 1948. They deserve nothing less than that we renew our unswerving commitment on this fiftieth anniversary to securing human rights for all — all human rights for all.

Perhaps the most significant achievement in the human rights field over the past 50 years has been that legitimacy has been secured for the principle that rights are universal and indivisible. Many States that initially showed little enthusiasm now accept this principle, and increasing numbers have signed and ratified the two covenants and at least some of the conventions.

Our task now must be implementation: to close the gap between rhetoric and reality. Daily, in every part of the world, we see examples of the failure to put into practice the rights so clearly set out in the Universal Declaration. Despite all the legislation, procedures and mechanisms that are in place, millions are still routinely deprived of their basic rights. Millions of refugees and internally displaced persons cannot return to their homes. Many of them belong already to generations born in refugee camps. Religious and ethnic minorities are persecuted; opposition to oppressive regimes is met with brutal force; those who speak in defence of human rights

are silenced, imprisoned, killed; women and children are the most vulnerable to abuse; the elderly and disadvantaged are cast aside, even by resource-rich societies.

The international community's record in responding to, let alone preventing, gross human rights abuses does not give grounds for encouragement. Genocide is the most flagrant abuse of human rights imaginable.

Genocide was vivid in the minds of those who framed the Universal Declaration, working as they did in the aftermath of the Second World War. The slogan then was "Never again", and yesterday we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Yet, genocide and mass killing have happened again — and have happened before the eyes of all of us — in Rwanda, in Cambodia, in former Yugoslavia and other parts of the globe.

Not only are civil and political rights being violated, but we have made poor progress on economic and social rights. We speak of the right to development, but what is the actual situation? Twenty per cent of the world's population own in excess of 80 per cent of the wealth and consume 80 per cent of the world's resources. It is shameful that people in industrialized countries should enjoy such high levels of prosperity while over a billion people are denied the most basic needs — adequate food and shelter, clean water, education and health care.

It is not sufficient that we give assistance when disasters strike poorer countries. Generous though such gestures may be, they do not get to the root of the problem. What is needed above all is recognition of the systemic disadvantages with which so many people are burdened, how far they are removed from the ideal proclaimed in article 1 of the Declaration that they should be "free and equal in dignity and rights".

We must also meet new challenges. Scientific and technological developments in fields such as genetics, human cloning and biotechnology are posing fundamental questions about our understanding of human rights. Other questions are posed by the potentially positive or negative role played by transnational corporations in our increasingly globalized economy.

The United Nations must rise to these challenges. I welcome the Secretary-General's strong commitment to integrate human rights into the programmes and agencies of the United Nations. Human rights form a crucial dimension to so many issues — humanitarian aid, conflict resolution, development — and recognition of this can only improve the effectiveness of the United Nations family as a whole. I believe important progress has been made during the past year, which we should now build on together.

I ask you to join our efforts to translate the words of the Universal Declaration into action. We could pay no greater tribute to those who framed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than by giving practical meaning to their ideas and vision. Could we not, for example, set ourselves the objective that all States sign and ratify the two Covenants and the four principle Conventions within the next five years; that all States make the Universal Declaration known to every one of their citizens, starting by introducing it into all primary education curricula; that all States implement the declaration on human rights defenders, not just formally but in a true spirit of support for human rights defenders everywhere; and, most importantly, that all States redouble their efforts to implement the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration in full.

As High Commissioner, I pledge to do, with my colleagues, everything in my power to forge a partnership with all of those committed to human rights. I will continue to speak out for those who have no voice or whose voices are disregarded. I will also continue to work positively with States and, at the same time, to strengthen monitoring mechanisms so as to ensure that they are matching promises with action. I will draw up strategies to meet the new challenges on the horizon.

I do not underestimate the task ahead. But I need your assistance and support in my work. Let us not mark this anniversary with fine-sounding words, but with deeds. That will be the surest way of keeping faith with those who, 50 years ago, framed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her statement.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/53/L.67.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt this draft resolution by consensus?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/168).

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now begin the ceremony for the award of Human Rights Prizes in 1998. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2217 (XXI) A of 19 December 1966, six prizes are to be awarded this year to individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I first call to the podium Ms. Sunila Abeyesekera of Sri Lanka.

Ms. Abeyesekera was escorted to the podium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Ms. Sunila Abeyesekera of Sri Lanka is the Executive Director of INFORM, one of the main human rights organizations in her country. A human rights activist for 30 years, her work focuses mainly on women's rights, armed conflict and conflict resolution. She has played a key role in lobbying and advocacy work within the United Nations human rights system and has established several organizations working on human rights and democratic issues in Sri Lanka.

May I request the Secretary-General to present the award to Ms. Sunila Abeyesekera.

The Secretary-General presented the award to Ms. Abeyesekera.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I next call to the podium Ms. Angeline Acheng Atyam of Uganda.

Ms. Atyam was escorted to the podium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Ms. Angeline Acheng Atyam of Uganda was born in 1947. A nurse-midwife and mother of six, she is a founding member and Vice Chair of the Concerned Parents Association, a group of Ugandan parents who came together to demand action when their daughters, 139 girls from the Saint Mary's School, were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in October 1996. Ms. Atyam has been a powerful spokesperson, giving voice to the concerns of thousands of families whose children have been stolen. She has worked tirelessly to secure the release of children in rebel captivity. She has also worked to bring national and international attention to the plight of the captive children, travelling to Europe and the United States.

May I request the Secretary-General to present the award to Ms. Angeline Acheng Atyam.

The Secretary-General presented the award to Ms. Atyam.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next award recipient is Mr. Jimmy Carter of the United States of America.

Mr. Jimmy Carter, known to all as a former President of the United States of America, was born in 1924. He has committed himself to the international defence of human rights. Mr. Carter has been involved with a variety of human rights issues, from defending religious minorities in Eastern Europe to working for the eradication of river blindness. He made an outstanding contribution to bringing a peaceful solution to the civil war in Liberia. The Carter Center played a significant role in brokering peace talks between the warring parties in that country.

Mr. Carter is unable to be present at today's meeting. In a letter addressed to the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, he stated that, although he and Mrs. Carter are saddened that they cannot be here today, they are deeply touched and inspired by the recognition provided by the Human Rights Prize on this most auspicious occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mr. Carter extended to the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner and all those responsible for the awarding of the United Nations Human Rights Prize his profound gratitude for the honour bestowed upon him through the presentation of this prestigious award.

I next call to the podium Mr. José Gregori of Brazil.

Mr. Gregori was escorted to the podium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. José Gregori of Brazil was born in 1930. His involvement in human rights dates back to the 1950s, when he was a student at São Paulo University when the military regime took power in Brazil. During that period, he cooperated closely with groups in trying to re-establish democracy. He is the head of the recently created National Secretariat for Human Rights. He has been active in strengthening national and regional cooperation for the defence and promotion of human rights.

I now invite the Secretary-General to present the award to Mr. José Gregori.

The Secretary-General presented the award to Mr. Gregori.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I next call to the podium Ms. Anna Sabatova of the Czech Republic.

Ms. Sabatova was escorted to the podium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Ms. Anna Sabatova of the Czech Republic was born in 1951. She has been involved in human rights activities for the past 30 years. She was sentenced to three years in prison for distributing leaflets that reminded Czechoslovakian citizens that to vote in parliamentary elections is not a duty, but a right. She is one of the founding members of Charter 77, a centre of civic resistance.

May I request the Secretary-General to present the award to Ms. Anna Sabatova.

The Secretary-General presented the award to Ms. Sabatova.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The sixth Human Rights Prize is awarded to the Human Rights Defenders of the World. In bestowing this honour to Human Rights Defenders, the General Assembly solemnly recognizes the contribution of all those women, men and young people around the globe who have struggled, often risking their own lives and giving voice to the voiceless, for the recognition, protection and promotion of human rights. This Human Rights Prize and the adoption yesterday by this Assembly of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms will be a historic testimony of the partnership between the United Nations and human rights defenders for past and future generations.

The commemorative plaque of the Human Rights Prize for the Human Rights Defenders will be displayed at an appropriate place at United Nations Headquarters.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I warmly and sincerely congratulate the recipients of these awards.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): Fifty years ago today, at the end of a long nightmare during which the most heinous atrocities were committed in plain sight, mankind kept a date with history by adopting a body of norms and values designed to restore human dignity and endow the human being with the status of citizen of the world, enjoying everywhere and under all circumstances the same rights and liberties.

Still, for a long time, humankind, such as it was, accepted without question a state of affairs in which nearly half of the people on this planet remained under the yoke of colonialism, at the margins of history and law. Indeed, we had to await the irresistible movement of the liberation of peoples and their long-thwarted emergence onto the world stage in order finally to recognize that colonialism, long tolerated and even celebrated, was in fact the very negation of human rights, and in order for the basic principle of every philosophy of human rights — that all human beings are born free, and equal in dignity and in rights — to prevail at last.

Since then, from conference to conference, from commemorative ceremony to commemorative ceremony — owing particularly to the outstanding normative work done by this Assembly, which has gradually expanded the field of liberties, and owing as well to the enormous awareness gained by men and nations of their rights — the culture of human rights has taken form and become anchored in the human spirit, while waiting to leave a lasting imprint on our acts and to shape our behaviour, thus becoming a kind of common language of humankind, a universal heritage that we must enrich and promote together, through dialogue and collective effort, far removed from any political stakes or uses.

Indeed, thanks to globalization, which for better or for worse is already making its mark on all human activities, and to the acceleration of the history that accompanies it, the culture of human rights — which, by definition, are constantly in movement — today is expanding its reign to the farthest corners of the world, pushing out particularities, reducing differences and erasing borders.

But at the very time when the dream of the universality of human rights seems to have been fulfilled, it has been shown — since all humankind is now a direct witness to the free exercise or violation of human rights — how illusory, imperfect and unjust is this universality, when no umbrage is taken at the enormous physical and spiritual distress in which hundreds of millions of our fellow humans are kept, condemned to ignorance, misery and sometimes death.

What can the exercise of civil and political rights mean to all those who have been excluded: the more than a billion people who survive on less than a dollar a day, and the even greater number living on only a pittance more, the nearly one out of six individuals who cannot read or write and the one quarter of the children of the South — half of whom are girls — who will never go to school?

In the area of human rights, which are by nature interdependent and indivisible, the only worthwhile measure is to take responsibility, in a consistent, integrated and global manner, for the economic, social and cultural needs of the individual, and at the same time for his civil and political rights, in the aim of permitting him to enjoy the full exercise of his rights and to shoulder, in security and dignity, his role in society.

In my country, despite the formidable challenges facing us, democracy has made major advances. Today the dynamic of liberty there is irreversible. The people, as well as the public authorities, are resolved to pursue and intensify the process of democratization now under way, in order to establish lasting democratic principles, rule of law and human rights in Algerian society, and in order to hitch our society, with its wealth of age-old values and culture, to the locomotive of progress and modernity.

Today, 10 December, throughout Algeria, in schools, in the mass media and wherever democracy is learned and exercised, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is being honoured.

On this anniversary, I would like, on behalf of Algeria, solemnly to reaffirm here our full and complete adherence to this founding text of human dignity and our determination to make it a living reality, convinced as we are that the culture of human rights, in order to flourish and take root, cannot be satisfied simply with the fleeting fervour of solemn commemorations; it is a matter of daily practice that must make its mark in space and in time. This is why the new law on education, which will soon be taken up by the Algerian Parliament, provides that henceforth children will have an obligatory course on democracy and human rights, which will prepare them to be the fulfilled Algerians of tomorrow, dedicated to their rights and aware of their duties, citizens of a world in which universality will be translated into solidarity with all those who have been excluded, where dignity will mean shared prosperity and where interdependence will be joined with hope.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I would like to remind delegates that we have a machine here with three lights — green, yellow and red. When the green light is on, everything is fine; when the yellow light is on, it is time for the statement to begin coming to a close; and when the red light is on, the statement is over. That is the golden rule to which our discussion will be subject.

I now call on the representative of Canada.

Mr. Fowler (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): In 1945, the drafters of the United Nations Charter embraced a commitment — binding to this day on each and every Member of the Organization — to achieve universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

This undertaking left its mark on the evolution of international affairs: from then on, the well-being of human beings anywhere became the legitimate concern of Governments everywhere.

Today, we commemorate the adoption of an equally historic document, one in which many extraordinary individuals, including Canada's own John Peters Humphrey, had a hand. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave definition to the visionary ideas of the Charter. It has become embedded in the fabric of customary international law and has served as a foundation and a source of inspiration for 50 years of achievements in the promotion of human rights.

Those achievements have been considerable indeed: freedom and democracy are today enjoyed by more people than at any time in history. At both the national and international levels, institutions to promote and protect human rights — economic and social, as well as civil and political — have spread, and often have flourished.

(*spoke in English*)

The growing consensus on rejecting impunity for violators of human rights and humanitarian standards is especially encouraging. The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court earlier this year in Rome was another milestone in this regard. Next week, Canada will sign the Statute, and we will work tirelessly to encourage others to sign and ratify it as well.

However, as we have been reminded in countless ceremonies over the past year, we must not be complacent. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, millions lack the most basic needs for a decent, dignified life. Grave human rights violations of every conceivable kind are all too prevalent. Our celebration today must therefore be tempered by that sombre reality.

Quite clearly, our principal task today must be to commit ourselves yet again to translating the noble principles of the Universal Declaration into effective protection for all of the world's citizens.

The obstacles that lie in our path are numerous, and overcoming them will require determined efforts on many fronts, whether in strengthening and financing our institutions or in confronting human rights abuses whenever they occur. In meeting such challenges, we must make common cause with all who share those goals. A growing community of private individuals and groups in all parts of the world is demonstrating a capacity and a determination that will not be denied to help advance the cause.

Governments cannot, and must not, abdicate their individual and collective responsibility to protect human rights. As the experiences of creating an International Criminal Court and of banning the widespread use of landmines demonstrate, we also face the moral obligation and political imperative of engaging those on whom our success or failure has an immediate impact.

This Assembly took another important step yesterday, when it adopted the Declaration on human rights defenders and confirmed our partnership with individuals and groups peacefully combating human rights abuses in all parts of the world.

The success or failure of this common enterprise also has direct and far-reaching implications for the broader interests of this Organization. The quest for human freedom and justice is a noble cause in its own right. But it is even more than that, for it embodies all of the basic purposes of the United Nations: peace, justice and prosperity for all.

We believe the United Nations human rights machinery can, and should, serve all of those goals, and we commend the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for their vision and leadership to that end.

Despite all the changes the world has seen in the past 50 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains at least as relevant and as fundamentally important as on the day it was adopted. Its principles provide for all Governments an ultimate standard, a measure of their legitimacy and of their effectiveness in serving the best interests of their citizens.

Inevitably, that is a standard against which all countries, including my own, will sometimes be found wanting. Today we can pay proper tribute to the Universal Declaration and the vision it embodies by reaffirming our individual and collective determination to address such shortcomings whenever they arise. In that indispensable task of the United Nations, Canada pledges its full cooperation to all.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): On 10 December 1948, in the wake of one of history's greatest horrors, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That simple Declaration became one of the foundations of the United Nations, embodying the very spirit of this institution.

Today we commemorate that great event and the visionaries who were most responsible for the document itself: Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States, the great spirit who would rather light a candle than curse the darkness; René Cassin of France, who lent his eloquence and pen to the first full draft of the Declaration; Charles Malik of Lebanon, who gave his knowledge and will to its organization and adoption; P. C. Chang of China, who ensured that the wisdom of Asia would inform the Declaration; and John Humphrey, whose tireless work was instrumental at its inception.

Today we thank them and everyone who has worked for the great principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights across the years, and across the globe. We

honour the courage and determination of human rights defenders over the centuries and commit ourselves anew to their struggle. The Declaration and the United Nations Charter commit the world's Governments and the United Nations itself to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of the human rights and fundamental freedoms that are the birthright of every person.

Fifty years ago today, when the General Assembly formally adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the new United Nations was given an inspiration and a mandate for its unprecedented international work. In fact, the Declaration set the standard for much of what has come to define this institution.

Like the undeniable truths incorporated into the founding documents of my country, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that are the unquestionable birthright of all people. Those rights include the right to life, liberty, privacy and personal security; the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to education; the right to the presumption of innocence when accused of a crime; the right to a full and fair trial; and the right to freedom of speech and opinion, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and association and freedom of movement.

Freedom — the right to freedom: that is the foundation of the Declaration that we proudly commemorate and reaffirm today. By adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world recognized that each individual is inherently dignified and worthy and that the rights of every person — every person — must be respected.

These essential principles of human rights unequivocally state that every person be given equal treatment under the law, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, or other philosophy, national or social origin, ownership of property or other status or class. In addition, the Declaration affirms every person's right fully to participate in the government and society of his or her nation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not simply enumerate the positive principles of human rights. It also confirmed the prohibition of practices that have stained the course of human history, such as slavery, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, exile and other cruel and inhuman treatment.

1998 marks both the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. The Vienna Declaration reaffirmed the fundamental duty of each nation to promote and protect all human rights and freedoms, regardless of the political, economic or cultural systems of those nations. No special circumstances or issues of development can justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights by any nation.

The advancement of democracy and human rights is a policy priority of the United States. President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright continually seek to incorporate human rights concerns throughout the foreign policy of the United States. I would like to note just a few recent examples. In 1994, the United States ratified both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women remains a very important policy priority. President Clinton has made the fight against racism and racial discrimination a major objective, announcing his Initiative on Race in 1997. Last year, the President convened the first White House Conference on Hate Crimes, and with Attorney General Reno began a detailed review of the laws concerning hate crimes.

Secretary of State Albright has also shown great dedication to the cause of human rights, as have all of our senior officials. The United States will continue to play a major role in assisting victims of torture, and is the leading donor to the voluntary fund for the victims of torture.

Today, the world celebrates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It remains our aspiration, our inspiration, our mission.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to The Right Honourable Claire Short, Secretary of State for International Development of the United Kingdom.

Ms. Short (United Kingdom): I am very pleased to be here today speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom, but I should make it clear that the Permanent

Representative of Austria will shortly deliver a statement on behalf of the European Union, with which the United Kingdom fully associates itself.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the adoption of which we commemorate today, is quite a remarkable document. It sets down in eloquent and moving language the fundamental rights to which each human being is entitled purely by virtue of their humanity — the rights necessary to secure basic human dignity and well-being for each and every person.

The Declaration is very clear that human rights mean not just civil and political rights, but also cultural, economic and social rights; not just freedom from fear but also freedom from want.

Drawing on their experience of the pre-war years, the framers of the Declaration knew that all of these rights were important and all were interdependent. They understood that economic depression and poverty help create the conditions that foster political extremism and war. And it was by working for both sets of rights — for full bellies and for free minds — that they sought to lay the foundations for a more peaceful and just world order.

But one of the tragedies of the last 50 years was that this vital argument got lost. The essential interdependence and indivisibility of human rights fell victim both to cold-war polarization and to North-South divisions, with one side claiming to care more for political and civil rights and the other for social and economic.

With the cold war now well behind us — and on the eve of a new millennium — we have an opportunity to recapture the spirit of 50 years ago and to renew our collective commitment to all of the principles of the Universal Declaration, for all people. That includes reaffirming that economic and social rights are as important as political and civil rights; that for one in four of the people of the world to be denied enough to eat and access to clean water, education and basic health care is both a moral outrage and a gross denial of their rights.

I am not asking for more emphasis on social and economic rights and less on civil and political, but a balance that seeks all rights for all people.

The British Government has committed itself to work for this goal and to give more emphasis to the human rights of the poor of the world. We give our strong support to the right to development. In Britain's development policy we have pledged specifically to work to secure the attainment of the international poverty eradication targets — the targets that derive from the great United Nations conferences of the past decade. As the Assembly knows, the key target is to reduce by one half the proportion of people living in abject poverty by 2015. This will mean nearly a billion people being lifted out of poverty within 20 years. The targets also mean that every child in the world will have primary education and every human being in the world will have access to basic health care and reproductive health care within 20 years.

These targets have been endorsed by almost all the Governments represented here today, and economic experts agree that they are affordable and achievable. What we have lacked up to now is the political will to translate these fine aspirations into action.

I believe the best way to mark the fiftieth anniversary would be for all of us to commit ourselves to meet the poverty eradication targets and thus fulfil the pledge made by the General Assembly 50 years ago, in the preamble to the Universal Declaration "to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms".

This will require a new partnership between developing and industrialized countries based on agreement to work together to meet the targets in every country. We know that conditionalities imposed on reluctant Governments in need of financial support do not produce results. We need strong leadership from the developing world, determined to achieve the reform necessary to deliver the targets and the economic growth necessary to reduce poverty. Where this is in place, the industrialized countries must deliver on faster debt relief, increased investment of aid and a more equitable set of international rules for trade and investment. This means, of course, in turn, reversing the decline in overseas development assistance. The British Government has taken this step, with a real-terms increase of 28 per cent in development aid over the next three years. I hope that others will follow suit.

This is the challenge of globalization. It is generating more wealth, but we must ensure that we create new international systems to ensure that the fruits of globalization are fairly distributed and that globalization does not lead to a more divided and unstable world.

We meet at a time when there is more democracy in the world than there has ever been before in human history. We must ensure that within that democracy the voices of the poor are heard and that we all make more effort to ensure that their political and social rights are fully respected. We all understand that the social and economic rights outlined in the Declaration cannot be delivered to all people immediately, and that full political and civil rights can be difficult when people are desperately poor. But we can, if we want, make faster progress, and that is the commitment we all made when we agreed to adopt the Universal Declaration. It is perfectly possible for us to remove abject poverty from the human condition before we are halfway through the next century — if we want to do so.

The framers of the Declaration were, I am sure we all agree, right to stress in the preamble to the Declaration that promoting respect for human rights is not just a matter for Governments. Individuals and civil society have an indispensable role to play in holding Governments to account for their policies.

We all know that, hard as we try, there is no such thing as a perfect Government anywhere. That is why we must strengthen civil society everywhere to ensure that all our Governments live up to their obligations under the Declaration. Those who promote and defend human rights — those whose work we are honouring today — will continue to have a vital role in the next half century in maintaining pressure on Governments to secure the realization of all human rights for all.

This is our common responsibility. To commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not just by fine words, and then putting them away again until the next commemoration, but by a renewed effort to do all in our power, as we promised in the Declaration 50 years ago, "by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance".

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Minister for International Development and Human Rights of Norway, Ms. Hilde Johnson.

Ms. Johnson (Norway): A map of the world was drawn 50 years ago. The world community now had a new map to navigate by. Based on the best values, this map showed new landmarks. Many of the previous roads, bridges and harbours had been destroyed in the Second World War. We needed new directions, new standards and new rules for interaction between States and between people. We had to create a new common ground, a common understanding.

The new map provided bridges to life, freedom, liberty and social security, bridges to inherent and equal rights, bridges to brotherhood, bridges to human dignity. This map was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This map is still urgently needed as an instrument to navigate by, because we are in stormy weather. Violent conflicts, often with ethnic overtones, threaten millions with insecurity and destruction. The global economic crisis is forcing workers out of their jobs, families out of their homes and children out of their schools.

The weakest among us suffer the most: mothers in despair, children exploited in factories and brothels, people experiencing the fate of becoming refugees in their own countries, religious communities persecuted for their faith, prisoners tortured and executed, children trained to kill their own relatives. We have only to open our eyes and use our ears.

Too often, human gain leads to human pain. Violence has many faces, but few voices. In such a landscape we need to stick to our map. Recognizing the worth of every human person carries an obligation. Human dignity should be our rock, human development should be the road we travel and human rights should be the vehicle we use. We must address the human pain. This is a time to give a voice to the voiceless, hope to the hopeless and freedom to those who have lost their liberty, because implementing human rights is beneficial for every society and every person. This is a time to consider basic rights and freedoms as building blocks for the future for all of us.

For far too long, the debate on human rights has been dominated by the assumption that human rights is all about civil and political rights, while development is all about economic growth. This is wrong. Certain human rights may seem of little value to people who are starving and in need. Combating poverty is indeed one of the most urgent human rights challenges we are faced with today. Far too many have turned a blind eye to this important fact. Economic, social and cultural rights must be given their rightful place alongside civil and political rights. Human rights constitute an integrated and mutually reinforcing whole. And we must be more willing to act upon this understanding. Poverty does not, however, make it more legitimate to oppress people.

Neither does culture: as a member of the South African Parliament put it, "Culture can never be an excuse for abuse".

Human development is the process of expanding people's choices. That United Nations definition should guide all our efforts. Human rights is an integral part of such a process. It is indeed a precondition for development. Human rights constitutes an integrated whole. Expanding people's choices means respecting people's rights: all of them; every single one of them. That is what development is all about. People must be able to expand their choices. They must be given a chance, a chance for change.

This is clearly not the time to reduce official development aid. The Norwegian Government is committed to increasing its development assistance to 1 per cent of gross domestic product and to giving substantial debt relief. We shall give more weight to our responsibility to assist States in fulfilling their obligation to implement human rights. The main responsibility lies, however, with Governments themselves. As donors, we can donate resources; we cannot donate rights. We can offer the means, but we cannot provide the will.

Promoting human rights starts at home. The map of the country must fit in with the map of world. I represent a country which, like the overwhelming majority in this room, gained full independence in this century. We have been and still are learning how valuable respect for human rights is as a building block for our society. Today we are releasing the first annual report on Norway's efforts to promote human rights at home and internationally. The report shows us what we have accomplished and tells us what we need to do. To this end, the Norwegian Government is also drawing up a national plan of action for human rights. The formulation of national plans of action was one of the commitments we undertook under the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. I can announce that Norway has decided to contribute $1 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the purpose of assisting countries in drawing up their own national plans of action.

Such national instruments should also address the issue of human rights and business ethics. What we do at home must be reflected in what our businesses do abroad. This too is an issue of ordering one's own house. In Norway we have established close cooperation among the business sector, civil society and government on human rights issues.

"All human rights for all" is an appropriate slogan for this fiftieth anniversary. It is already a pledge, but it should also be a plea. I want to call upon all Member States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Conventions on the Rights of the Child, on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. I call on them to withdraw their reservations that run counter to the letter and the spirit of these instruments, then to embark on the road of implementation and respect for these obligations. I urge them to stick to the map.

"All human rights for all" does not allow for any exceptions: not for women because they are not men; not for children because they are too young; not for the poor because they lack resources; not for the imprisoned because they are not free; not for the disabled because they are weak; not for the old because their future is short. These and all other discriminatory exceptions imply a denial of the basic worth of every human person.

Yesterday we adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We recognize that investment in human rights presupposes individuals and groups that know their rights, that know the value of those rights and that know how to fight for them. We recognize the need for guides to help us use our map, for we need to stand by our commitments even when the going is tough.

"Humanity owes it to itself to watch over, guard and protect those who represent it and who devote their lives to beneficent activities". Those are the words of René Cassin, the main author of the Universal Declaration, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo 30 years ago today. In his Nobel lecture Cassin said that "for the establishment of peace and human dignity, each of us must work and fight to the last". That work and that fight must go forth from this meeting to our own countries, to all those who are accountable. It requires us to have faith, never to lose sight of the intrinsic value of every human being, to protect, to care, to save, to give shelter and to give voice — not for our own sake, but for the sake of humanity.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I wish to remind members that there are 126 speakers on the list, and that it was the General Assembly itself, not its President, that decided to set a five-minute limit on statements in this commemoration. I note that statements thus far have exceeded that limit by an average of three minutes. If speakers do not observe the limit, there is no telling how long these meetings could last: possibly through today and into tomorrow.

I call on the representative of Japan.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): Today, we have gathered here to reaffirm our commitment to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which we adopted yesterday, is an expression of our determination to make further progress in the field of human rights. It is also important to recognize on this occasion the efforts of all those who have worked to defend this worthy cause, some at the cost of their own lives. In the same vein, I would like to congratulate the winners of the United Nations Human Rights Prizes, who have shown unwavering dedication to the cause of protecting and promoting human rights.

During the last 50 years, a number of important human rights instruments have come into effect. The Commission on Human Rights has established various kinds of working groups, special rapporteurs and special procedures that have contributed to further elaborating the ideas of the Universal Declaration or to monitoring human rights situations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been established. Following the creation of the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, historic progress was made when the Statute for an International Criminal Court was adopted.

Yet, despite all these encouraging developments, serious violations of human rights continue to occur. There are so many men, women and children around the world whose rights have been violated; so many people who have been deprived of their dignity. In areas where absolute poverty prevails, our goal of a world free from want is far from being a reality and people die of malnutrition or of preventable diseases.

We still have a long way to go before the lofty purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is fully achieved. We must strengthen our efforts anew in order to confront various kinds of menaces that threaten the survival, daily life and dignity of the human person and to uphold the core values of respect for life, liberty, justice and equality.

Respect for human rights, durable peace and sustainable development are all interrelated. Violations of human rights often precede conflicts. On the other hand, respect for human rights is an integral component of the post-conflict peace-building process. Without respect for human rights it is not possible to achieve peaceful solutions of conflicts; without peaceful solutions of conflicts it is not possible to achieve stable economic development.

On the basis of this recognition, Japan took several initiatives this year. The second Tokyo International Conference on African Development adopted the Tokyo Agenda for Action, which included a chapter entitled "Good Governance". The Conference affirmed that promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law was a fundamental goal to be achieved as the basic foundation for development.

In promoting universal respect for human rights, the importance of advocacy cannot be overemphasized. Japan therefore hosted a symposium on human rights in January in order to promote a sense of partnership and cooperation among the countries of the region in this field. We also hosted an international symposium on children in armed conflict in November, which is an issue that requires our immediate attention.

As United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mrs. Mary Robinson and so many other people have mentioned, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is still today a living document for every human being. Its value transcends time and space. We have to act with a sense of utmost urgency to relieve the plight of the victims of human rights violations, who are suffering even at this moment.

With this in mind, I would like to reaffirm on this solemn occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Japan's strong commitment to this worthy cause and its determination to bring about universal respect for the inherent dignity, equality and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Austria, who will speak on behalf of the European Union and who will have seven minutes to do so.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): As you have said, Mr. President, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. In addition, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, align themselves with this statement; so if you take a count, I am probably sparing the Assembly some 100 minutes of statements.

First, I would like to extend our most sincere congratulations to today's winners of the United Nations Human Rights Prizes. With their courage, dedication and commitment to the cause of human rights, they represent with honour the work of countless organizations and individuals to advance the cause of dignity and freedom in their own countries and internationally.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Their encouraging statements this morning underlined their leadership roles in the international human rights system.

The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a time to take stock and to redouble our efforts to implement human rights in all countries of the world. The Union would like to seize this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the objective of achieving all human rights for all.

The Universal Declaration is a milestone in history. As the first comprehensive international proclamation of the basic rights of the individual, it established a common understanding of human rights for mankind. It was the basis for subsequent human rights instruments, not only at the universal but also at the regional level. For many countries, the Universal Declaration served as a guide in the formulation of national bills of rights. The Universal Declaration is as relevant today as when it was drafted. It remains the centrepiece in the edifice built over the last 50 years for the protection and promotion of human rights.

In this context, the European Union welcomes the adoption of the Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court as a crucial step in combating impunity and again calls on all States to sign and ratify the Statute as soon as possible.

The Universal Declaration is based on the fundamental and universal premise that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The Declaration establishes clear principles on how Governments shall treat women, men and children. It also stipulates that "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" (*article 21, para. 3*). It entitles everyone to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families.

The idea of human rights is simple, but it had and continues to have a dramatic impact in history. It has helped to bring down colonialism, apartheid and dictatorial regimes and to end the division of Europe. Democracy and the rule of law are taking root in more and more countries. Even in temporary periods of economic crisis, it is increasingly understood that human rights are not a luxury for the few but a necessity for all. Societies are transforming under the growing recognition that the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by women and girls is essential for the advancement and empowerment of women and thus for society itself. The almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a landmark achievement in the promotion and protection of the rights of all human beings.

Today, there is broad agreement that human rights are universal and indivisible, as reaffirmed by the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, in Vienna.

Every single State has the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. Governments are and need to be held fully accountable. Increasingly, individual responsibility of officials for their acts is being established. But the concept of human rights is not a spear directed against States; rather, it has become clear that respect for human rights has long-term benefits for States and for those tasked with the responsibility of government. As the Universal Declaration stresses in its preamble, human rights must be protected if men and women are not to be compelled to have recourse as a last resort to rebellion against tyranny and oppression. Human rights are recognized as an essential element for ensuring stability and preventing conflict.

Still, human rights continue to be violated in all parts of the world. Even on this very day people are being denied their most fundamental right, the right to life. No country is free of human rights problems or of

human rights violations. This, of course, is also true of the member States of the European Union. However, in assessing the performance of States in the field of human rights, one decisive distinction can be made, and that is the one between the many democratic Governments which are genuinely committed to addressing and overcoming human rights problems, and authoritarian regimes, which hold on to power through oppression and persecution.

In countries which have made dramatic progress over the last 50 years, the struggle for freedom and human dignity has often been led by courageous individuals who stood up against injustice and oppression. They took great risks, and many paid a heavy price. Some of them became well-respected political leaders of their countries after years of darkness.

Human rights defenders bring international human rights closer to our attention. Their work is key for ensuring that Governments live up to the commitments they have undertaken. They monitor and report; they raise awareness. However, or perhaps for that very reason, no day goes by without violations against these human rights defenders. Such a practice has to be brought to an end, and the international instrument to do so is the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Its adoption yesterday on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration is an important step for us Governments in recognizing the important role of human rights defenders. It is first of all a promise and commitment to fully respect the human rights of those men and women who devote themselves, individually or as members of non-governmental organizations, to the defence and promotion of human rights. Governments must take this commitment very seriously and intensify their efforts to secure the protection of human rights defenders.

The European Union is founded on the basis of the principles and values of the Universal Declaration, which guides both its internal policies and its external relations. At this hour, European Union Foreign Ministers, the Presidents of the European Parliament and of the European Commission, representatives of civil society and, of course, the Deputy Secretary-General, are meeting in Vienna, on the eve of the European Council, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary. The Union is determined to ensure respect for human rights in all its actions. In this context, the European Union has adopted a special declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary, which is meant to initiate consideration of concrete measures for reinforcing the capacity of the European Union in the field of human rights. The text of that declaration is annexed to Austria's statement, which has been distributed to representatives.

We will strive for the strengthening of the international system for the promotion and protection of human rights, and we are committed to continue to cooperate with international human rights mechanisms. We actively support the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We will continue to seek dialogue with other countries on human rights issues, both bilaterally and within the framework of international organizations. We will continue to support Governments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in their efforts in the area of human rights.

The 10th of December is the culmination of the fiftieth anniversary year, but the struggle for the fulfilment of the promises of the Universal Declaration must be continued and intensified. We should do so in partnership — between Governments and civil society, and among Governments themselves. The United Nations will continue to play a central role in this regard, as a forum for dialogue and for further improvements in international standards, and as a forum for scrutiny of the human rights performance of Member States and for assisting countries to live up to their human rights obligations.

For human rights to be respected, a deeply rooted culture of human rights has to be developed worldwide. Education, in particular human rights education, is crucial in this regard. In a world in which everybody knows his or her rights, in a world where Governments and individuals are being held accountable for their actions, the chances for human rights to prevail will significantly improve. Let us continue to work towards that goal.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's regret that this important debate is taking place in the basement of the Organization. We know the reason, but we do query the signal this sends regarding the Organization's priorities.

All over the world, including in my country, events are being held to commemorate this very significant day. With the adoption of the Universal Declaration half a century ago, the international community entered a new era in the way it conceived of the rights of the individual.

In the late twentieth century, New Zealanders continue to place great value in the security provided by the multilateral system, and we take pride in our work within the United Nations. Our engagement emerged against the backdrop of the Second World War. For the post-war international community, the devastation and degradation that had been experienced engendered a desire to rebuild — to be certain that nothing so catastrophic could ever happen again. The hunger for a fairer, better peace was powerful indeed.

The enormity of the inhumanity visited upon individuals and whole communities during that war demanded a response. New Zealand was one of a number of nations that sought to maximize the potential of this moment. Alongside other States, we called for explicit provisions in the Charter which related to human rights.

The efforts of like-minded delegations were reflected in the final version of the Charter. It begins with the familiar words: "We the peoples ... reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights". Fundamental personal freedoms are thus at the very heart of this world Organization.

The adoption of the United Nations Charter was the first time ideas about human rights and fundamental freedoms had been integrated into a negotiated international agreement. This was the first acknowledgment that the international community also had a responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. Article 1 of the Charter declares that one of the most important purposes of the Organization is the promotion and encouragement of "human rights and ... fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

New Zealand played a relatively unknown but important role in the negotiations which led to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. We strongly advocated the inclusion of economic and social rights in the Declaration. In the words of Mr. Colin Aikman, a member of the New Zealand delegation present at the negotiations:

> "Experience in New Zealand has taught us that the assertion of the right of personal freedom is incomplete unless it is related to the social and economic rights of the common man. There can be no difference of opinion as to the tyranny of privation and want. There is no dictator more terrible than hunger." (*A/PV.181, p. 117-120*)

Recalling these words, spoken 50 years ago, reminds us that human rights — civil, cultural, economic, political and social — are indivisible. The Secretary-General has reminded us that human rights lie at the heart of all that the United Nations aspires to achieve in peace and development.

The fiftieth anniversary is a moment to reflect on what we have achieved over the last 50 years in the field of international human rights. We can take pride in the fact that the international community has developed a comprehensive framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. It covers the full range of human rights, including the right to development. These rights are universal. We call for their full acceptance and implementation.

We have also established within the United Nations a High Commissioner for Human Rights, invested with a strong mandate and worthy of our respect for the excellent work that she is doing. We must support this Office not just with words but with concrete resources.

Our reflections should not take in only the past. As States we must take primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. This work does not rest solely in the hands of Governments, however. Indeed, the very impetus behind the Universal Declaration 50 years ago began in the words and deeds of civil society.

Nothing has changed in this regard. Today there are large numbers of individuals and organizations committed to the promotion and protection of human rights at the grass roots of society. The work of these human rights defenders is fundamental. They speak for individuals and groups who have no voice. New Zealand therefore applauds the adoption by the General Assembly yesterday of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In conclusion, the progress we have made in the last 50 years gives us good reason to look ahead with optimism. But we go forward knowing that in the last 50 years we have failed to live up to the ideals contained in the Declaration. The Declaration was adopted with the intention of guarding against the atrocities witnessed during the Second World War. Yet since it was adopted we have witnessed genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, and "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. We enter the new millennium knowing that violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms are still taking place in many parts of the world. That is why this day must be one not

of self-congratulation, but of deep reflection and recommitment.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to the President of the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan, Mrs. Cholpon Bayekova.

Mrs. Bayekova (Kyrgyzstan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an event of historic significance. It not only sums up the activity of Governments and the United Nations in the field of human rights, but also affords an opportunity to determine subsequent actions in this area with a view to achieving universality and the full and comprehensive implementation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is noteworthy that this commemoration coincides with the fifth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, which culminated in the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and also with the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and with the establishment of the International Criminal Court. To this extent, 1998 will go down in history as the year of human rights.

I say "to this extent" because there are, unfortunately, as yet insufficient grounds for proclaiming the true triumph of human rights in the international community. We are still seeing armed conflicts, accompanied by the mass exodus of refugees, violence and flagrant violations of human rights. We see how authoritarianism stifles democracy, chokes the shoots of freedom and slows development. We are witnesses to poverty and various forms of intolerance, discrimination and debasement of human dignity. We are convinced that double standards still exist in the field of human rights. As long as these challenges still exist, we cannot and must not rest on our laurels.

Mankind must realize that human rights, development and democracy are interrelated, that the progress of society is measured above all by the state of affairs with respect to human rights, and that guaranteeing and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms lies at the foundation of peace and stability. Mankind must continue to aspire to the radiant dream of a time when all individuals will enjoy human rights and the individual will be the embodiment of human rights.

The Declaration is a kind of international yardstick with which Governments can measure progress in the field of human rights. It is not by chance that the purposes and principles contained in the Declaration and in the International Covenants on Human Rights have been reflected in the constitutions and national legislations of many States of the world, including in the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, which was supplemented and amended as a result of the nationwide referendum held on 17 October with a view to the further development of democracy and of various forms of ownership and to the provision of firm guarantees of freedom of speech and of the press.

Attaching great importance to the Universal Declaration, Kyrgyzstan ratified it as far back as the Republic's twentieth day of independence, on 20 September 1991, thus placing human rights firmly among the highest priorities of its domestic and foreign policy. We have acceded to all six of the main international human rights agreements and also to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. I am also pleased to announce that the day before yesterday I signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/117, an organizational committee was set up in Kyrgyzstan and a national programme was drawn up for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under this programme, a number of monographs and collections of articles were published; scientific and practical conferences, symposiums, seminars and competitions were held; a series of postage stamps was issued depicting leading human rights activists; and a solemn meeting took place with the participation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Askar Akayev, deputies of the Parliament, members of the Government and the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organizations and the general public. A bill of amnesty was submitted to Parliament to mark the seventh anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's independence and the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a moratorium on capital punishment was also proclaimed. Currently, Kyrgyzstan is preparing to submit to the United Nations, on 22 January 1999, its first report on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an occasion for the further stepping up of activities to increase awareness of the development, promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This solemn event should make us think about what we do every day. But let this everyday work not darken and overshadow this glorious day.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Ms. Carmen Moreno.

Ms. Moreno (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mexico is here before the highest forum of the international community to reiterate its unswerving commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We have come here to bear witness to the political importance, continued validity and relevance of the values embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represents the aspirations of the peoples and individuals that constitute the United Nations.

For 50 years this Declaration has attested to the diversity, plurality and creativity of the human being. It aims to guarantee the full and harmonious development of the individual and recognizes the value of the individual in the community.

When it was first presented, Mexico decisively supported this initiative. We were active participants in designing it, and we contributed elements of Mexican law to it: the legal concept of *amparo* was included among the fundamental rights. We are honoured to have been one of the 48 States that voted in favour of the Declaration.

Fifty years ago we Mexicans had already embodied in our 1917 Constitution a broad range of individual and social rights. Since then these rights have been enriched through the signature and ratification of numerous international conventions of the United Nations and the Organization of American States — some on offences such as torture and racial discrimination, others expanding the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, disabled persons and migrant workers. Today Mexico is a party to 41 international human rights instruments and cooperates fully with their mechanisms.

To convert into deeds the spirit of the Universal Declaration, we are constantly strengthening our legal framework. On 1 December this year the Senate unanimously approved the recognition of the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, thus also contributing to the consolidation of the inter-American system in this field.

The human rights of migrant workers have been a constant concern of the Mexican Government. The alarming increase in violations demands our attention and a remedy. The Mexican Senate is considering the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, with a view to its ratification.

Women's rights have been particularly strengthened since the historic United Nations World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975; but we must broaden those rights even further.

In Mexico we are determined to eradicate impunity and to promote a culture of respect for human rights. We believe that any violation of human rights should be punished.

However, the full exercise of human rights faces serious obstacles and challenges. Pending issues still require priority attention; discrimination and xenophobia, racism, inequity and extreme poverty are sources of human rights violations. We must also avoid double standards and the selectivity and politicization that distort the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration.

We recognize, as any other State committed to human rights, that there is still a long way to go to achieve the full implementation of the values enshrined in the Declaration.

We must work without respite to achieve a more just and equitable international order, with greater shared responsibility, one that addresses the main shortcomings in a timely and effective manner and overcomes the challenges of the end of the century. The right to development is an essential component of the universal regime of complete respect for all human rights. The lofty principles enshrined in the Declaration must be a driving force that promotes the full development of the human race.

We reiterate today, from this rostrum, Mexico's commitment to the full and constant implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of this Declaration, a document that represents both the origin and the objective of historical processes, we must use this

opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Mexico, for its part, will continue to help transform into deeds the principles of that historic Declaration.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today we and the world are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary — the golden jubilee — of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has its roots in the first and second preambular paragraphs of the United Nations Charter:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, ... reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in its first article, provides that

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

This is fully reflected in the Charter. However, that text and others on human rights also have their roots in ancient civilizations, whose heritage is still alive, carved in stone, such as the Code of Hammurabi, written almost 4,000 years ago. Such texts did not come from a vacuum; they are a product of history. The Arab Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab The Just, said more than 13 centuries ago, "How could man enslave his fellow man when he was born free?"

The importance of this day resides in the fact that it opens the door for us to talk of the challenges that face us in the light of international developments, particularly over the last two decades since the Universal Declaration was adopted. As regards the achievements in drafting agreements in the field of human rights, we believe that there is no longer a need for further covenants, charters or protocols — or to force them into every decision made.

On that basis, there is no need for new mechanisms to implement these covenants, charters or resolutions. What is really called for is true international political will, good faith and a true belief in the equality of human beings before the law, regardless of colour, ethnicity or religion. In this context, I would reaffirm that the challenges facing the international community are based on, first, the need for avoiding double standards or selectivity in international relations. Secondly, there is a need to face up with strong political will to racial laws and practices, particularly ethnic cleansing and collective expulsion, wherever they occur. Thirdly, there is a need for the international community to face up to occupation and settlerism, because these are violations of the first order of human rights. We must not be silent before the occupier and its practices of injustice and oppression of the dignity of those under occupation, particularly in the Arab territories occupied by Israel.

Fourthly, non-discrimination between the fundamental rights and freedoms of human beings, whether political, social, economic or cultural, is needed. We must concentrate on the right to development, and we must not link human rights to economic assistance. Fifthly, the United Nations machinery must not be abused in a diplomatic framework in order to intervene in the internal affairs of other States. There must be no arbitrary measures or undemocratic means in international relations, under the pretext of defending human rights. Sixthly, we must truly realize the extent and concepts of human rights in relation to the civilization and cultural heritage of every society. It would be erroneous to believe that concepts and particular patterns of human rights can be imposed on peoples. Every people has its own history; every nation has its own culture and heritage. Through dialogue, through interaction between civilizations and through free will, a common understanding can be reached in a practical framework.

Syria has committed itself to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has participated in drafting international human rights covenants and instruments. We have adhered to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Our Constitution and legislation fully reflect the standards and human concepts embodied in these principles.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts, as well as to Mrs. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I would like to express Syria's continued readiness to reach out and to cooperate

with the international community for a better world of peace, security, stability and dignity for humankind.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Our commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights today is a unique opportunity to reaffirm the fundamental humanitarian principles that form the underpinnings of the Declaration as comprehensive and indivisible rights.

Since 1948, the world has realized many accomplishments in the area of developing and promoting large-scale protection of human rights, through the adoption of international instruments and conventions to protect those rights. These have been inspired by the Universal Declaration, which did not constitute, at the time of its adoption, a legal obligation; nor did it reflect international law at that time. In spite of this, the adoption of the Declaration was a shared achievement for all peoples and nations. The Declaration has become a historical milestone, confirming that human rights issues had become a legitimate concern of the international community, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, which placed on the shoulders of all nations a collective responsibility to advance and promote international respect for human rights at all levels. Thus, these rights, which belong to all members of the human family, have become the basic minimum standard binding on all States.

Our responsibility today is to provide the political will needed to ensure respect for and development of human rights by adopting international norms, which are recognized as absolute and free from double standards, in order to ensure justice and objectivity in the monitoring of their application. This surely will help to bridge any gap in this regard. It is clear that this responsibility will not be completely fulfilled without the promotion of economic and social rights and the right to development, in view of the conditions of material deprivation and poverty suffered by increasing numbers of human societies. In this regard, we cannot but pay tribute to the ceaseless personal efforts made by Mrs. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her endeavour to create benchmarks that would put economic and cultural rights on a par with civil and political rights.

My country, Jordan, in spite of its sensitive position in the Middle East, its difficult economic conditions and its hosting of the largest number of Palestinian refugees, has spared no effort to provide all possible assistance to refugees and to grant them all rights, without discrimination, until their cause has been achieved by just, legal and acceptable means. In that spirit, Jordan fully supports peoples in their exercise of the right to self-determination, in the context of international humanitarian law, including the full right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish its independent State on its national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

On the other hand, and in addition to emphasizing the values of tolerance, the defence of human rights, guaranteed under the Jordanian Constitution and domestic legislation, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary one must say that the Declaration's real value lies in its making equality and the observance of human rights a part of the intellectual fabric and the daily life of the average Jordanian through practice and application. The Government of Jordan promotes the consolidation and institutionalization of human rights at the national level through the establishment of national institutions specialized in the area of human rights, at both the conceptual and practical levels.

Not only has Jordan always opted for dialogue and openness in dealing with its surroundings in a region that has suffered crises since the beginning of the century; it has also applied this approach in its legislation and domestic policies, which have been strengthened by its adherence to 17 human rights covenants.

I affirm that we all are called on to cooperate and coexist in accordance with our civilizations, religions and different ethnic groups, and to seek a formula for dialogue that highlights the common denominators of the different creeds and religions of the peoples of the world. This will help us to achieve our common goal of building a system of ethical values shared by all civilizations, to ensure respect for human rights and human dignity and to preserve our political, physical and ethnic plurality. Absolute respect for human rights within the framework of democratic rules and laws, which are the result of the implementation of these rights as well as a guarantee of their continuity and flourishing, is the only way — indeed, it is a short cut — to establish prosperous, advanced, coherent and healthy societies capable of building a better future for this world. We call upon all States of the world to place the protection of human rights in its rightful place at the forefront of their priorities.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): I feel very privileged and proud to speak for Australia at this historic commemoration, although I must say that it is our view also that it would have been more fitting to conduct this important debate in the General Assembly Hall, with the full weight, dignity and solemnity that that venue confers and that this occasion demands. In this supreme intergovernmental body, we feel it is the voices of government that should be singing loudest today.

My sense of pride is particularly pronounced because Australia was one of the eight members of the small group of countries charged with drafting the Charter, along with Chile, China, France, Lebanon, the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Our inclusion in that group is, on occasion, overlooked. In the wonderful film that was shown as part of the series being seen in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the moment to commemorate this event, the camera pans very quickly over the Australian plate; and I did not hear the name of William Hodgson mentioned in Peter Burleigh's list.

But let me assure the General Assembly that Australia's inclusion in that group was neither accidental nor the luck of the draw. It actually flowed from the significant role that Australia played at the end of the Second World War in contributing to the development of international human rights policy. Our then Foreign Minister, Mr. Evatt, made a key contribution during the negotiations on the United Nations Charter to ensure that respect for human rights was placed equally alongside peace, security and development as the primary objectives of the United Nations, and it was very much in recognition of Australia's efforts in promoting human rights in the newly established United Nations that we were included in that drafting committee. We also held the presidency of the General Assembly when the Declaration was adopted by the United Nations in Paris on 10 December 1948.

Fifty years later, we join with alacrity the international community's celebrations of this powerful instrument, which continues to have an enormous effect on people's lives all over the world. Yesterday, my Prime Minister sponsored a motion in the Australian Parliament recognizing the fundamental importance of the Declaration and reaffirming Australia's commitment to the principles that it articulates. Yesterday also, Australia signed the Statute to establish an International Criminal Court, an act of symbolic importance on the eve of today's celebration, underscoring a very important fact that the body of international human rights law is not static, but is still evolving.

Despite the impressive and ever-evolving body of international human rights instruments and mechanisms, as Mrs. Robinson reminded us this morning, the protections embodied in them can be fully realized only if they are universally and fully implemented. The more effective and widespread the implementation of the instruments, the greater the protections, quite simply, to each and every individual.

The real challenge facing us, therefore, is not just to continue developing the human rights system, but to do the less dramatic, the less eye-catching, the more practical work of ensuring that existing mechanisms and instruments work as effectively as possible. We also need to give adequate protection to the defenders of our human rights, to those who put their lives on the line to protect others, whether they be individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations, lawyers or anyone committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is for that reason that my Government particularly welcomes the adoption of the Declaration on human rights defenders as an apt conclusion, in a way, to the celebrations marking this human rights year.

We also want to underline that this year is not just the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also the year that marks the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. We think that the commemoration of these two events has a special significance, given the interrelationship between the Declaration and the Vienna Programme of Action. If the Declaration is the foundation on which the United Nations human rights goals are built, then it is the Vienna Programme of Action that charts the course for the international community into the next century by providing a framework of principles and a practical programme of activities for achieving these goals.

This celebration gives us an opportunity to promote the message of the Universal Declaration and to provide fresh inspiration to us all to continue our efforts to achieve all human rights for all. For its part, Australia will continue to do all it can, domestically, in our region of the Asia-Pacific and internationally, to promote and

protect the rights enshrined in the Declaration to ensure that they become a reality throughout the world.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Andorra.

Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation*): The twentieth century has been the century of the great wars, of millions of dead, of the atom and of totalitarianism. During this century we have demonstrated that we human beings have the ability to inflict total destruction upon ourselves. At the end of the millennium, it can be frightening to look back, and certainly very few of us can evaluate our recent history without shuddering, for we have been so close to the edge. However, though we drew near enough to the abyss of evil, we were able to opt for the light that emanates from the flame of the human spirit. After the Second World War, as we strove to demonstrate which economic system was the most appropriate for the development of mankind, we were building, sometimes imperceptibly, a doctrine that proclaimed the intrinsic values of the human condition.

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In itself this date redeems, but does not forgive, the disasters of our age. For the first time, humankind had a universal guide to good and evil approved by all peoples. Before 1948, to kill, to torture, to discriminate and to abuse could be a reason of state. With the Universal Declaration, a clear concept separated what was worthy of humankind from what was not. While it is true that over the centuries, various cultures, philosophies or religions have promoted tolerance and respect towards others, it was not until 1948 that the peoples of the earth adopted the concepts that transcend what is personal and near to us. The Declaration is universal, bringing together, and even transcending, all cultures and traditions, uniting human beings with common principles that are clear and non-negotiable.

No law has value if it is not applicable and ultimately applied. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not lain stagnant during these 50 years. After its adoption, the United Nations Human Rights Committee set the objective of reflecting its principles in binding international treaties with specific provisions for the States that adhere to them. This objective has to a large extent been achieved.

Another reason to rejoice is the success achieved last summer at the Rome Conference for the establishment of an International Criminal Court. Although we are still at the initial stage of laying these new foundations of international law, recent events encourage us to believe that those who in the future claim that the means justify the ends, thus trampling human dignity, will not go unpunished.

Andorra participated actively and steadfastly in the Rome Conference, the result of which was that the first words of the Statute of the International Criminal Court were drafted by the Andorran delegation. It is Andorra's mission, with 720 years of uninterrupted peace behind it, to speak out on human rights issues in international forums, with the honesty accorded by the lack of major geopolitical interests. Moreover, Andorra's traditional dedication to tolerance, freedom and individual dignity, as praised by the refugee Brother Tomàs Junoy during the early decades of the nineteenth century, led, during the years of constitutional consolidation, to the current complete integration of human rights laws into the body of law. Within the context of the Council of Europe, Andorra has already adhered to all European instruments related to human rights. Since our admission to the United Nations, we have become a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Coinciding with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the Government of Andorra has already adopted the necessary measures to process the remaining human rights instruments of the United Nations.

Andorra, as a small State, knows its inhabitants. The words of Eleanor Roosevelt, Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee in the early years of the United Nations, now touch us more than ever:

> "Where, after all, do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world ... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

In Andorra, where the community is small, we must make a special effort to ensure that respect for human rights is more universal and more present than ever in the fields of education, in our justice system, in relationships between individuals, in relationships between institutions and citizens, in the exercise of our democracy and in the expression of our international solidarity.

During these 50 years of human rights, we have laid the foundations for the future solidarity of humankind. The third millennium will witness fairer relations between

human beings. The 1993 Vienna Declaration, like the guidelines of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, point the way for the years to come. The right to development, the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of the physically disabled, progress in gender equality and responsibilities in the promotion of rights are some of the issues that form the context of the present debate. Andorra, which was just beginning its modern economic development in 1948, could not contribute then to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, today we have the privilege of full participation, and we undoubtedly will participate in its future development.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al-Hinai (Oman): As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights, it is an opportune time for the international community to reinforce what has been achieved in the area of human rights towards the full realization of the noble goals and objectives enshrined in the Declaration.

In its relations with other States, Oman is guided by the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and in this regard, Oman has always reiterated the need to establish friendly relations with other States based on cooperation and coexistence. The conferring of the International Peace Award on 15 October 1998 on His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said by 33 non-governmental organizations and universities in the United States is a true attestation to the distinct role Oman plays for creating an atmosphere of understanding and peaceful coexistence in our region and the world at large.

With the promulgation of the basic statute of the Sultanate of Oman on 6 November 1996, the legal system in Oman was elevated to a higher plane, whereby the statute's seven chapters define the system of government, the principles governing State policy, public rights and duties and the roles of the Head of State, the Government, the judiciary and Majlis Oman, a bicameral Parliament comprising the Majlis Ash-Shura, with its 82 elected members, and the 41-member Majlis Ad-Dowla. The basic statute of the State further reaffirms the enjoyment by the people of all civil and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, thought and religion. Oman guarantees full access to free health and educational services for all its people, as it continues to aspire to achieve a higher level of security and prosperity for all.

My Government firmly believes in the importance of the right to development as an integral part of basic human rights. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in the developing countries, where poverty, deprivation, lack of basic health and educational services, unemployment, instability and internal conflicts challenge the very basis on which human rights stand.

As we commemorate this important occasion, let us not forget that the Palestinian people have been fighting for the last 50 years for those same basic human rights enshrined in the Declaration. My country hopes that the peace process in the Middle East will eventually translate the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinians into the realization of an independent State which will enjoy all basic human rights.

As we approach the third millennium, it is our hope that through the United Nations and its relevant bodies, as well as regional organizations, the international community will be able to realize the noble objectives enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which would benefit all nations and secure their most legitimate right to live in peace and prosperity.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Observer of Palestine.

Mrs. Barghouti (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): We meet here in the United Nations on Human Rights Day to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This fundamental document holds great importance for human beings all over the world. The commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary has a special meaning that should give all of us the incentive to continue to work and struggle to achieve all that is set forth in the Declaration, not just in certain places but everywhere in the world, and not only for a few people but for all people throughout the world. This commemoration should also remind us of the importance of working and struggling to guarantee the implementation of and respect for other human rights instruments, as well as of international humanitarian law and international law in general.

The first preambular paragraph of the Declaration states,

"*Whereas* recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

The international community has without a doubt achieved great advances in that direction. At the same time, we all realize that there are still urgent responsibilities that must be fulfilled in order to reach our goals and objectives in this regard. Accordingly, as we reaffirm individual human rights, we must also reaffirm collective human rights, including the rights of deprived and poor peoples, and the rights of people to life, self-determination, development, freedom and independence.

The General Assembly divided Palestine only a few days before the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since that day, the Palestinian people have remained a unique example in their subjugation and violations of their human rights. There is not a single article of the Declaration whose rights the Palestinian people are not deprived of, nor is there a single article that Israel, the occupying Power, does not violate. Here I would like to refer to article 3, regarding the right of everyone to life, liberty and security of person; to article 5, which states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and to article 13, which stipulates the right to freedom of movement and the right of each individual to return to his country.

We hope that this commemoration will provide an occasion for the international community to renew its commitments and to meet its obligations to combat all violations of human rights. The fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration should also serve as a forum for the development of more innovative ways and means to monitor and guarantee the implementation of the objectives set forth in the Declaration and in all the relevant international instruments. Fifty years ago the Declaration provided us with basic principles and goals in the struggle for basic human rights and dignity. Its fiftieth anniversary, which coincides with the dawning of the new millennium, should inspire in us the desire and vision to see that its principles are fully implemented and respected as we enter the twenty-first century.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.